Schemes to attract more tourists

2930. SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI: Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) whether nearly 3.21 million foreign tourists arrived in India in 2004 generating Rs. 21,828 crore in foreign exchange;

(b) if so, whether for the same period 5.5 million Indian tourists went abroad;

(c) whether in view of visa on arrival scheme for tourists from 15 countries including Australia, the tourists won't have to wait to get visa;

(d) whether to attract more tourists Ministry of Home is considering two crucial proposals, first is visa arrival scheme for tourists from 16 countries and the second is considering to issue restricted area permit and protected area permit for foreigners going to North-East; and

(e) if so, to what extent this has also helped to improve tourists traffic in India?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY): (a) and (b) An estimated 3.37 million foreign tourists arrived in India during 2004, and estimated foreign exchange earnings were Rs. 21,828 crore. During the same period an estimated 6.2 million Indians went abroad.

(c) to (e) Under the scheme of visa on arrival, the tourists are issued visa on arrival to the country on payment of prescribed fees, after necessary checks by Immigration Authorities. Besides other benefits, the scheme saves the tourists the hassels of visiting the Consulates etc. and the time taken to get the visa in their own country. The Group of Ministers on Tourism Industry and Trade had in principle approved the implementation of the scheme of visa-on-arrival for 16 identified countries, which did not include Australia. However, Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has expressed its apprehensions on account of security scenario in the country and it has been suggested by them to put on hold the scheme, till security scenario in the country improves.

With regard to the issuing of RAP/PAP for foreigners going to North-East, a number of places of tourist interest have been opened for foreign tourists, which can be visited by them after obtaining permits

from competent authority. As per the information received from MHA, the RAP/PAP regime is under review taking into account the security scenario in the country. As per the data received from the State Governments, number of foreign tourist visits to the 8 North-Eastern States, including Sikkim, during the years 2002,2003 and 2004 were 22047, 29478 and 39437 respectively.

Programmes to promote Meenakshi Temple

2931. SHRI R. SHUNMUGASUNDARAM: Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Madurai Meenakshi Temple is being considered for selection as one of the seven new wonders of the world;

(b) what are the programmes of the Ministry to promote the Meenakshi Temple as one of the major tourist attractions in Southern India either through prints or electronic media; and

(c) whether her Ministry is funding for the renovation and maintenance of the Temple?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY): (a) Ministry of Tourism has no such proposal under consideration.

(b) Information pertaining to Madurai city including Meenakshi Temple is disseminated through publicity materials and through Ministry of Tourism website—www.incredibleindia.org. Tamil Nadu Tourism also promotes Meenakshi Temple as a major tourist attraction through print and electronic media.

(c) No such proposal is under consideration. However, Central Financial Assistance of Rs. 15.00 Lakh in 1998-99 and Rs. 9.00 Lakh in 2000-01 was sanctioned to the State Government for improvement of environs around Meenakshi Temple.

Decline in flow of tourist in Assam

2932. SHRI URKHAO GWRA BRAHMA: Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state: